

Message Text

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PAGE 01 COTONO 00952 051331Z
ACTION SCS-06

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C O N F I D E N T I A L COTONOU 952

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: CASC
SUBJ: BENNETT CASE: LATEST DEVELOPMENTS

1. AT JUNE 30 COUNCIL OF MINISTERS MEETING, THE MINUTES OF WHICH WERE PUBLISHED IN THE JULY 3 EDITION OF THE SEMI-OFFICIAL NEWSPAPER EHUZU, THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT WAS MADE CONCERNING BENNETT AND HAMZA: "DURING THE SAME SESSION THE KEEPER OF THE SEALS, MINISTER OF JUSTICE, LEGISLATION AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS PRESENTED A COMMUNICATION TO THE COUNCIL CITING THE DEBTS OF ELHAJ DOCTEUR NAUTA AMZA (SIC) AND RICHARD BENNETT (SIC), BOTH BUSINESSMEN OF NIGERIAN AND AMERICAN NATIONALITY RESPECTIVELY. AT THE END OF THIS COMMUNICATION THE COUNCIL HAS DECIDED TO PLACE THE AFORESAID ELHAJ DOCTEUR NAUTA AMZA AT THE DISPOSITION OF THE AMBASSADOR OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA IN COTONOU AND THE AFORESAID RICHARD BENNETT AT THE DISPOSITION OF THE CHARGE D'AFFAIRES OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA IN COTONOU, THE INTERESTED PARTIES HAVING RECOGNIZED THEIR DEBTS TOWARD SEVERAL BENINESE ENTERPRISES AND HAVING AGREED TO HONOR THEM."

2. TO DATE, WE HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO DISCUSS MATTER WITH BENINESE OFFICIALS, BUT CHARGE WILL BE SEEING DIRECTOR OF PROTOCOL AND CONSULAR AFFAIRS PAQUI EARLY JULY 6 FOR SPECIFIC INFORMATION ON BENNETT'S STATUS. ALTHOUGH WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT IS MEANT BY BENNETT BEING PLACED AT THE DISPOSITION OF
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THE CHARGE, BENNETT'S LAWYER KEKE TOLD HIM THAT THIS WAS MERELY A RHETORICAL FORMULA TO ENABLE BENINESE TO SAVE FACE IN RELEASING BOTH HAMZA AND BENNETT. WE HAVE CHECKED WITH NIGERIANS AND THEY ARE AS MUCH IN DARK AS WE ARE ABOUT EXACT PROCEDURE TO BE FOLLOWED. KEKE, HOWEVER, STATES THAT RELEASE PROCEEDINGS ARE INDEED UNDERWAY AND IT IS SIMPLY A MATTER OF GATHERING NECESSARY DOCUMENTS SIGNED BY APPROPRIATE

MINISTRIES, A PROCESS WHICH WILL TAKE A FEW MORE DAYS.

3. BENNETT HAS SETTLED HIS OUTSTANDING DEBTS WITH NATIONAL TRANSIT COMPANY SONATRAC BUT HAS TOLD CONSUL THAT HE STILL OWES APPROXIMATELY THREE MILLION CFA IN OTHER DEBTS. HIS MAIN WORRY IS THAT DELAY IN RECEIPT OF \$20,000 TRANSFERRED BY MRS. BENNETT MAY KEEP HIM IN BENIN BEYOND HIS RELEASE DATE. IN ANY EVENT, HE IS OBTAINING TOGO VISA SO THAT HE CAN LEAVE BENIN AS SOON AS RELEASE IS EFFECTED.

4. WE HOPE TO HAVE FURTHER INFORMATION TO COMMUNICATE TO DEPARTMENT AFTER MEETING WITH PAQUI JULY 6. THOMPSON

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